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# TOWN WHERE TIME STOPPED STILL



## The Story of **SEABECK**

by GORDON NEWELL

Illustrations by DON SHERWOOD



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Wash. 19

TOWN WHERE TIME STOOD STILL

THE STORY

OF

SEABECK, Wash.

BY

GORDON NEWELL

ILLUSTRATIONS

BY

DON SHERWOOD



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Wash St.

# TOWN WHERE TIME STOOD STILL

THE STORY OF SEABECK

by  
Gordon Newell

Illustrations by  
Don Sherwood

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## FIRST SETTLEMENT

In the early days of the year 1856 the bark *Brontes* was following the westward course of empire from Maine to California by way of the Cape Horn road. It was a long road and a wet, cold road, especially for men like master millwright Marshall Blinn who, with his crew of sawmill hands, was tasting the miseries of a windship voyage around Cape Stiff for the first and, they fervently hoped, the last time.

The *Brontes* was following in the wake of the great clipper ships on the San Francisco run. The clippers, most beautiful objects ever built by men, were born of the greed for California gold, but the sturdy little *Brontes* was built of solider stuff. Her owner, Blinn, had little faith in the Will-o'-the-Wisp riches of the gold diggings. In her holds were all the machinery and equipment needed to build a new steam sawmill in the West. In her foc'sl and cabins were the skilled men to build and operate it . . . Down East mill hands who knew how to saw logs into fragrant, golden lumber.

San Francisco, jumping-off place for the Sacramento gold fields, was the magnet that was drawing men and ships from East to West and it was for San Francisco that the *Brontes'* course was set as, deep-laden with Marshall Blinn's embryo saw-mill, she shouldered the great Cape Horn rollers aside, playing tag with the deadly ice of the low latitudes, dipping her stubby bowsprit at last in the gentler blue swells of the Pacific.

The warmth and good smell of spring was in the air when the *Brontes* rolled in through the Golden Gate to drop her anchor off the roaring Embarkadero of boom-town San Francisco. Even from his bark's decks, Blinn could see the raw earth and raw lumber of new construction ashore. Obviously there was an ample market here for the product of his mill . . . once it was set up and sawing lumber.

There were problems to be solved first, however. The boilers, machinery and saws in the *Brontes'* holds were the best that money could buy. There were few repair facilities in the western wilderness and machinery had to be of the best. The mill equipment represented an investment of 20,000 dollars . . . the entire fortune of Marshall Blinn. He needed advice as to where his mill should be built and he needed financing. He hoped to find both in San Francisco.

Blinn was a New Englander with work to do; typically, he wasted no time in finding what he needed. William J. Adams of San Francisco had ready money to invest and he, too, knew a good thing when he saw it. He introduced Blinn to three men from the Puget Sound country of Washington Territory . . . J. R. Williamson, Bill Harmon and W. B. Sinclair. The frontiersmen from the far Northwest knew just where to find plenty of timber to feed the hungriest of sawmills; they too had a bit of money to invest. The five men joined forces to build a new mill and, incidentally, a new town on the nation's last frontier.

The tempo of the new firm's activities was set by the tireless Marshall Blinn. By early fall the *Brontes* had received voyage repairs and a fresh supply of stores and equipment and was standing out past the Farralones, bound north for Washington Territory. Blinn and Williamson were on her quarterdeck, prepared to supervise the building job. Forward, the Down East mill hands looked happier than they had for a long time. A few days ahead lay mightier forests than they had ever seen and thousands of miles of good dry land. Their seafaring days were almost over.

Wind and weather were friendly to the new enterprise. In less than a week the *Brontes'* crew and passengers lined the bulwarks to watch the Northwest's guardian island, Tatoosh, come out of the mist to mark the entrance to the Strait of Juan de Fuca. As the bark swept past the high, rocky island in the sea, the New Englanders looked at it in puzzlement.

"There must be a sawmill hereabouts already," Blinn observed to Williamson. "The houses on that island . . . all except the lighthouse . . . are surely made of sawn lumber, and a mighty good grade at that."

Williamson laughed. "Fooled me the first time I saw 'em, too," he admitted, "but those planks never was touched by a saw. They're Indian houses, built by the Makahs with nothin' fancier than a stone ax. They just tap the big cedar trees and the planks fall off as neat as slicin' cheese."

Blinn reflected on these savages who used stone axes to do the work his 20,000 dollars worth of sawmill machinery was designed for. "How do they get along with the lighthouse keepers?" he asked.

"They don't," Williamson said. "That light was built in '54, but the Indians chased the keepers off the island and it aint been lit since."

The Maine mill hands looked solemn. This was, indeed, a strange and disturbing land in which they had come pioneering . . . a far cry from the neat white clapboarded villages of New England.

The slow passage into the heart of the wilderness by way of the wide, deep strait granted them only brief signs of civilization. Once they passed a chuffing side-wheel steamboat looking strangely out of place between shores of primeval forest and soaring, snow-capped mountain ranges . . . the Hudson's Bay Company's *Beaver*, according to Williamson.

Further on they passed a wide bay with a tiny settlement on its western shore and a small brig at anchor near the beach. "That's Port Townsend," Williamson said. "It's one of the oldest towns on the Sound . . . settled six years ago and growin' fast." He pointed ahead. "Yonder's Foulweather Bluff. We swing hard right there into Hood's Canal. That's where we'll find the best timber in the world, and the water to float it."

The lateral waterway into which the *Brontes* stood at Williamson's direction seemed narrow and constricted after the broad reach of Juan de Fuca's strait, but its water was deep and crystal clear. The shores, Blinn noted with enthusiasm, were lined solidly with the biggest, straightest trees he'd ever seen.

Captain George Vancouver and his men of H.M.S. *Discovery* had first sailed that narrow inland sea in 1778. Afterward they named it, as they had many places of northwestern America, for a British peer. In his journal, Vancouver wrote, "Early on Sunday morning the 13th, we again embarked; directing our route down the inlet, which, after the Right Honorable Lord Hood, I called HOOD'S CHANNEL<sup>1</sup>."

1. It is a curious fact that Vancouver named many places "channels" in his journal, but wrote them down as "canals" on his excellent charts. This was the case with Hood's Canal.

... Edmond S. Meany, "Vancouver's Discovery of Puget Sound"

Vancouver had not bothered to give a name to the quiet cove where the *Brontes* came to anchor on the crest of the evening tide, 15,000 sea-miles and many months away from her home port of Seabeck in the State of Maine. The Indians called it *L-Ka-bak-hu* and they had always found it a pleasant place to fish and dig clams and laze away the long summer days. The salmon ran well there and there were rich thickets of blackberries inland, which the women gathered to mix with well-aged fish oil for potlatch feasting.

They came, next morning, in their cedar canoes to watch the mad white men land at *L-Ka-bak-hu*, convinced more than ever of their madness when they saw that Blinn and his men had no apparent interest in leaping fish or juicy berries. Amid much shouting of men and groaning of yards and tackle, they watched strange objects of wood and iron being hoisted from the depths of the winged ship and rowed ashore, lashed to the ship's boats.

On the beach a surveyor's transit was set upon its spindly legs as Marshall Blinn paced off distances and shouted orders to his men. Tools were broken out after long disuse and skilled Maine woodsmen spat on their hands and looked hungrily at the great Douglas firs towering above them.

For many moons thereafter the canoe Indians of Hood's Canal saw many marvels unfold before their wondering eyes. All that winter and the next spring the once quiet cove echoed to the sound of ax and adze and clangling metal. Finally, on a July morning of 1857, came the most awesome wonder of all. A great, blood-curdling shriek sent seagulls winging down the water in panic. Steam was gushing from a shining cylinder and smoke was pouring from a black smoke pipe. Marshall Blinn's sawmill was ready for business. Its whistle was calling the crew to work and so was the head sawyer. "Come on, boys, let's start sawin' lumber!"

The favorite camping ground of the Indians had lost its peace and quiet and it would be a long time before anyone would be hearing a big silver salmon slap the water in the early morning or a bear grumble in the blackberry thickets along the beach.

The little cove on Hood's Canal had lost its age-old quiet and its age-old name at the same time.

"We'll call it Seabeck," said Marshall Blinn. "Seabeck, to remind us of home."



## THE MILL AND THE SHIPYARD

The Seabeck mill wasn't the first to begin gnawing into the virgin forests of the Puget Sound country . . . in 1847 Michael Simmons had harnessed the power of Tumwater Falls at the southern tip of the Sound to a crude log cabin sawmill, and Henry Yesler's steam mill had been bringing coastwise lumber ships to the young town of Seattle on Elliott Bay for three years . . . but Marshall Blinn's Maine-built machinery was the finest and most modern and no town on Puget Sound was more prosperous than Seabeck.

There were predictions that Seattle was finished as a town, despite the location there of Yesler's mill. Indians had attacked the settlers there early in 1856 and it was said that only the presence of a U.S. sloop-of-war, the *Decatur*, had saved the town from complete destruction. Many of Seattle's citizens had been scared away and some of them were working in the Seabeck mill, helping to turn out an impressive cut of 15,000 board feet of lumber a day.

The *Brontes*, transferring her base of operations from Seabeck, Maine, to Seabeck, Washington Territory, made regular voyages to San Francisco, deep-laden with the lumber for which the California builders were eager to pay with newly-minted gold. With no limit to available timber and with a rich market clamoring for more and more lumber, the mill was enlarged and improved at Blinn's direction.

When some of the partners disagreed with his expanding plans, Blinn, with Adams, bought them out and continued to build. By 1864 the 15,000 foot a day cut had increased to 50,000 and a whole fleet of sailing ships had joined the *Brontes* to carry Seabeck lumber, not only to California, but to the ports of the world.

The arrival of a lumber ship was always an event, heralded by three long blasts of the mill whistle. Everyone not actually needed to keep the mill in operation ran poste-haste to the company store on the dock to get the news from the outside world and to watch the new dress goods and fancy groceries from San Francisco being unloaded and placed on mouth-watering display by the storekeepers.

All this was grist for the mill of Marshall Blinn. The ships carried his lumber to market and brought back payment in hard cash. They brought goods for his store, too, and this added to the profits, for the prices of goods in western mill town company stores were traditionally high. A sack of unrefined sugar cost \$20.00, kerosene was a dollar a gallon and a sack of potatoes cost nine dollars. Mill hands, who worked for two dollars a day, had little left over for idle amusements if they had a family to feed, but that was all to the good as far as Marshall Blinn was concerned. He was a God-fearing man and an ardent prohibitionist; he didn't want his town of Seabeck to become the sort of drunken, brawling combination of sin and sawdust that was typical of most frontier mill towns.

With the mill and the town well established, Blinn, in 1865, promoted the opening of the most modern shipyard on the Sound at Seabeck. For the next two

decades, Seabeck-built ships plied the world's more than seven seas, carrying Seabeck-milled lumber; ties for California railroads, boards for homes in New Jersey and shingles for barns in Iowa.

The first ship to go down the ways was a stubby towing steamer, the 83-ton *Colfax* built to handle logs for the mill, but she was followed by stately deep-water windships. Notable among them were the graceful barkentine *American Boy*, the Washington Mill Company's deep-keeled *Olympus* and the fleet, 1200-ton *Cassandra Adams*, one of the fastest sailors on the coast.

The ocean-going steamer *State of Sonora* was built at Seabeck for the Mexican government, the steamer *Georgia* as a Sound passenger and towboat for Captain John Connock, and the powerful steam tug *Richard Holyoke* as flagship of the mill's expanding towing fleet.

With two solid industries well established, there seemed no doubt that Seabeck was destined for great things. The shipyard continued to prosper, and so did the mill. By 1874 it was turning out a wide variety of lumber at unprecedented speed. The records for that year show a cut of 14,000,000 feet. Four years later it was thoroughly modernized, new foundations being laid and new engines installed. With these improvements the mill's output rose to 150,000 feet of lumber every 24 hours.

A dozen logging camps were located within a dozen miles of Seabeck, all of them feeding the giant Douglas fir logs to the screaming headsaws on tidewater. Each year the skid roads snaked deeper into the vanishing forests and the tugs strained at bigger and bigger log booms on the salt waters of Hood's Canal.

Expansion was the watchword of Marshall Blinn and it remained the motto of the town he founded in the wilderness. In 1883 a second mill, bigger and more modern than the original one, was added to the town's industrial waterfront. The

new mill was to be revolutionary in more ways than one. The Washington Mill Company, which was the official name for the firm Blinn had founded, was interested in cutting costs and the cheapest thing in the West of 1883 was the services of a Chinese laborer.

The Chinese were imported to build transcontinental railways in the late 70's and early 80's, after which they became a drug on the market. Willing to work hard for less money than anyone else in the world, they offered employers an unlimited pool of cheap labor and working men a most unwelcome source of competition.

It was decided to operate the new Seabeck mill entirely with Chinese labor, a move which was viewed dimly by the white mill hands of the pioneer establishment. If the plan worked it was obvious that they would soon be out of a job. Fortunately for them, the unskilled Chinese proved highly unsuited to the exacting work of running a big sawmill. Their costly mistakes more than offset the savings in wages; moreover, anti-Chinese riots were sweeping the West Coast as white workers turned to violence in ridding themselves of competitive pressures of Oriental labor.

Mills are highly combustible and mill owners are proportionately adverse to riots, which have a way of erupting into both violence and flame. The Chinese mill hands of Seabeck were turned loose to fend for themselves, most of them scattering along the coast to open hand laundries in every town and village capable of generating a basket or two of dirty clothes.

The two big sawmills and the thriving shipyard at Seabeck were back on an all-white basis, paying standard wages and making better than standard profits.

By 1885 Seabeck was, in the words of pioneer journalist Clarence Bagley, "the liveliest place on Puget Sound." And it looked as if it was going to stay that way.

## BOOM TOWN

As the sawmills and the shipyard prospered and expanded, it was inevitable that Seabeck, the town, should expand with them. The Territorial Legislature, in 1858, authorized a road to connect Seabeck with the head of Hood's Canal. This was followed in a few years by a territorial trail between Seabeck and Port Orchard Bay. The town was well on its way toward becoming the transportation crossroads of Puget Sound.

When citizens of the smaller village of Seattle sought quick transportation to the outside world of the 1860's they frequently hired an Indian with a dugout canoe to paddle them to Port Orchard, from whence they hiked the trail to Seabeck. There were always ships loading there for most of the ports of both seaboards and the company store on the mill dock served as an informal travel agency.

Spike-booted, stag-denimed loggers from the surrounding timber camps hiked the skid roads to Seabeck too, but for a different



reason. They sought whiskey and excitement and, despite Marshall Blinn's best efforts to the contrary, they eventually got it.

The United States Hotel, established by Collins and Jamieson, was built to cater to the roistering loggers from the backwoods and "blue ruin" whiskey flowed freely across its scarred bar, but as far as Blinn was concerned it was a den of iniquity. In desperation, he bought it from its proprietors at a premium price; offered to turn it over rent free to any respectable person who would operate it "on temperance principles."

No one was so foolish as to attempt running a barless hotel in a Northwest mill town, so Blinn kept it open at his own expense for a while. It was, however, against his New England instincts to operate a business at a loss, so he soon gave up the battle.

The final victor in the battle between Blinn and the forces of evil was a half breed Indian named Bill Warin. Warin opened an establishment grandly named the Cliff House, letting it be known that his bar would stock as fine an assortment of drinking liquor as could be found in Washington Territory.

Marshall Blinn girded himself for the fray, even journeying to the territorial capital of Olympia in an effort to prevent Warin from obtaining a license to sell spirituous liquors. Warin, no mean politician in his own right, blocked every move of Blinn. The Cliff House was duly opened on strictly non-temperance principles.

Further humiliation was to be Blinn's portion from the hands of the rascal Warin. When Blinn filed as candidate for territorial delegate to Congress, Warin filed against him. Blinn was a boss, and bosses weren't popular with the rank and file of 19th century working men. Warin was a friendly fellow who served good whiskey and was always good for a small loan. Warin defeated Blinn in the election.

Marshall Blinn was heart-broken. The town he had built was no longer his. He sold out his interest in the Washington Mill Company to his brother Samuel in 1869. Shortly thereafter he resigned his official position as Postmaster of Seabeck and moved to Hunt's Point, on the shores of Lake Washington, where he died in 1888.

Without the restraining hand of Marshall Blinn, Seabeck became a wide open town. With no law nearer than Olympia, authority was vested in Richard Holyoke, who had been hired to manage the mill for the owners, all of whom now lived in San Francisco. Holyoke was too busy cutting lumber to worry overly much about minor infractions of law and order. Liquor was sold to loggers and Indians alike and the town was noisier at night after the mill was shut down than during the day when it was running.

By 1877 Seabeck was a town of 400 population, boasting four saloons, two hotels, two stores, a church, a little red schoolhouse and a five-acre cemetery. An ornately carved wooden marker from that pioneer burial ground is preserved to tell its mute and concise tale of sudden death in boom town Seabeck . . . "Sacred to the memory of HYRAM BRYANT, age about 45 years, who was killed in a dispute on the 26th day of January, 1868."

"Dispute" was a rather mild term for the goings-on in Seabeck's saloons and hotels of that period. A typical story was that of a young mill worker's wife who journeyed with her children from San Francisco to Seabeck to join her husband. Since the lumber ships, which were the only means of transportation, kept no regular schedule, her husband wasn't sure just when she would arrive and was out of town when the huffing *Colfax* towed the San Francisco schooner to the mill dock. It happened to be the night of July 3, 1879, and most of Seabeck's citizenry were already getting up a fine head of steam to properly celebrate the Grand and Glorious Fourth.

The young wife took a room at the leading hotel, anticipating a night of undisturbed rest after the uncomfortable voyage from California. Alas for her innocent hopes, the room assigned her was directly above the bar, which was doing a truly monumental business. As the night progressed the noise below reached such a crescendo that even the bartender could no longer stand it. He tried to get things under control by refusing to sell any more whiskey, but this merely provoked his clients into producing guns and shooting all the windows out of the hotel.

The unfortunate woman upstairs dragged the mattress from the bed and jammed it into the window frame as a frail barrier against flying bullets. She and the children huddled on the bare floor as the bartender gave in to superior force and set more bottles on the bar below. Toward dawn, things began to quiet down a bit. Finally came an unearthly silence, almost as frightening to the mother and children as the preceding din.

Then came the most horrifying sound of all . . . a sinister bumping, dragging noise as of numerous lifeless bodies being dragged down the hotel's front steps. The poor young mother pulled a blanket tightly over her head and those of her children and waited grimly for the light of day.

With the summer sun high in the sky, the unhappy woman summoned the courage to drag the mattress from the broken window. Sure enough, a score of bodies lay stretched out in a row on the hotel lawn. Worst of all, the town of Seabeck was wide awake and going about its business as if nothing were wrong. Seemingly respectable citizens were enjoying the holiday and ignoring the bodies on the lawn.

Only much later did she learn that the celebrating loggers had merely passed

out after drinking up all the bar's supply of potables; that they had then been laid in a row on the lawn to sober up as was the custom of the better Seabeck hotels.

The little mill town on its salt water cove was wild, wooly and unrestrained by present-day standards, but it was certainly no worse than most frontier lumber centers of its era . . . and it was better than many. It had a solid nucleus of respectable family people who gave their support to more cultural activities than those engaged in at the waterfront saloons.

Ministers of the Catholic, Episcopal, Methodist and Baptist churches visited Seabeck regularly. The Reverend Damon began regular services in 1870 and by 1880 a real church building was constructed; services no longer had to be held in stores or private homes.

The educational needs of the community had been met even earlier. Marshall Blinn donated a lot at the head of the bay in 1866 and a special tax levy was approved for the building of a one-room school there. The cost of construction was \$367.98. School District No. 3 was guided in its pioneer days by directors who included such Hood's Canal notables as J. R. Williams, Bill Harmon, E. L. Miller, D. B. Jackson, Michael Fredson, Nathan Bucklin, E. C. Lindsey, Richard Holyoke and, of course, Marshall Blinn.

Mounting school enrollment was a problem then as now, and in 1877 a new and larger schoolhouse was built at a cost of \$1,267.43. This one was paid for by the mill company, but the "Big Snow" of 1893 was too much for its roof, which collapsed. The original little red schoolhouse was pressed back into service until repairs could be made. A third building, constructed at the same site in 1911, is still in use.

Many Washington pioneers learned readin', writin' and cypherin' at the little Seabeck school, among them the first two white children born in that area, Anna Galvin and William Williamson, both born in 1858. Williamson later became a prominent citizen of Seattle, where, as master of the fast and famous steamer *Flyer*, he was the idol of another generation of Puget Sound children.

It was in the early 1880's that Clarence Bagley wrote, in his *Puget Sound Courier* of Steilacoom, "Seabeck is just now the liveliest milling town on the Sound. A big ship, a large schooner and an ocean steamer are building there, besides which the sawmill is cutting 70 to 80 thousand feet of lumber daily."

That was Seabeck in its heyday, and like most Western boom towns, it was a place of contradictions. Its saloons and hotel bars catered to loggers and windship sailors. Even less restrained liquor dealers furnished "*kloshe lum*" to the Salish Indians who visited town in their dugout canoes and set up dilapidated camps along the beach to sample the doubtful pleasures of the white man's civilization.

On the other extreme, Seabeck had its school and its church; its Masonic lodge and its Ladies' Sewing Circle; its free public library and its brass band, which could play as loudly, if not as harmoniously, as any symphony in the land.

One thing was common to both segments of the town's life . . . confidence in the future! The population had passed 600; was headed for a thousand. Industry was going full blast and plans were under way for an even bigger mill. Yes, Seabeck was the liveliest place on Puget Sound and it was going to get a lot livelier.

Bull skinner from the forest skid road or respectable housewife going to the weekly meeting of the sewing circle at the fine red schoolhouse; both were convinced that Seabeck was destined to grow into a mighty big town.

Nothing could stop it!

## MILL TOWN LEGENDS

Every Northwest town in frontier days had its share of colorful and highly individualistic characters . . . men and women who were the stuff of legends which have become part of the regional folk lore. Seabeck was no exception. The sea and the forests are natural breeding grounds for legendary characters and Seabeck had one foot in salt water; the other in the tall timber.

The masters of the coastwise and deep-sea sailing ships added their share to the tall tales of the mill towns. Most of them were dignified and respectable when ashore, but some changed character rapidly when they boarded their ships. Like the mill operators ashore, they enjoyed a great deal of authority and didn't look kindly on efforts of working men to organize themselves to promote such radical ideas as a ten-hour working day and clean bedding in bunkhouses and foc'sl's.

One hard-bitten master mariner, approached by a newly signed seaman, was deeply hurt when the sailor demanded over-



time pay for any duties performed outside his regular watch. The skipper demanded an explanation for this revolutionary suggestion and was duly shown a copy of the rule book of the newly organized Sailors' Union.

"Very interesting," observed the captain after scanning the book. "*Now tear off the front cover and eat it!*"

The seaman looked doubtful until the skipper removed a belaying pin from the mizzen fife-rail and hefted it thoughtfully. He then detached and ate the cover, as directed.

Every day thereafter the skipper summoned the unfortunate sailor to the poop and supervised the consumption of another page from the union rule book. The back cover was eaten by the sailor somewhere off Cape Horn. He was then restored to normal duty by the captain, who observed that he was lucky he hadn't produced an unabridged dictionary to prove his outlandish ideas about regular hours and overtime pay.

The inland steamboats which served Hood's Canal ports in later years produced their share of individualistic skippers too. The little *Delta* worked the Canal route in the 80's and 90's, skippered by the Captains Troutman. Mrs. Troutman could handle a steamboat as well as her husband . . . better, according to her own account . . . and she could outshout him, so there was always considerable doubt as to just who was in command when the *Delta* or the *Dode*, which the Troutmans bought to replace their first boat, whistled in for the Seabeck dock.

The Troutmans sold the *Dode* at the turn of the century, planning to settle down on their claim at Lilliwaup Falls, but the male Captain Troutman, carrying the proceeds in his pocket, disappeared one night and was never seen again. Mrs.

Troutman gave up steamboating, but she never lost her urge to boss male skippers. She often rowed out to shout directions and pungent criticism at harassed masters . . . even the formidable "Red Jack" Elmore, who carried a brass fire hose nozzle up his gold-braided sleeve and used it effectively to quell obstreperous loggers who tried to carry on their shoreside celebrations aboard his steamer.

The lost gold of Captain Troutman was just small change compared to Seabeck's lost Chinese treasure, for which optimistic legend listeners still occasionally search. Ah Fong was, in the early days, cook for the mill hands. Like most Cantonese, he was both skilled in the culinary art and frugal in his habits. He lived in a tiny shack back of the town meeting house, ate his meals from cook house left-overs and was reputed to be still in possession of the first American dollar he had ever earned.

Proceeds from the sale of lumber cargoes were, at that time, deposited in a San Francisco bank to the credit of the mill company. A coastwise ship, heading north at about the time a payroll was due at mill and shipyard, would carry the required amount of cash to Seabeck.

If the ship carrying a payroll was delayed by storms, calms or late sailing, the mill management was in the habit of securing a temporary loan from the thrifty Ah Fong. When the pudgy Chinese saw the mill manager approaching the cook house he would meet him with the smiling question, "How muchee?"

The reply was usually "Five thousand, if you can spare it." Ah Fong would nod happily, wipe his hands on his apron and trot off toward the forest. He would soon return with the required amount in twenty dollar gold pieces.

But one fatal day Ah Fong trotted off to his private bank in the woods and never returned to the cook house on the beach. Legend has it that he was murdered for

his money, most of which is probably still buried somewhere on the hill behind the town. To this day campers and tourists sometimes wander off to the Seabeck woods in search of Ah Fong's vanished hoard of gold.

The first proven murder on the Canal took place in 1868 as the result of a typically inconsequential saloon brawl. Jim Allen, logger, was killed by an Australian ex-convict named Charley Young in a dispute over a bottle of whiskey. Young served a term in prison, after which he reappeared in Seabeck, vowing vengeance on those who had sent him to jail. Shortly thereafter he, too, disappeared, his fate as mysterious as that of poor Ah Fong.

The first violent death by accident occurred shortly after this murder. A young San Francisco machinist, repairing the mill machinery, was caught in a belt and crushed to death. Tragedy struck again soon after this when two loggers insisted on taking a canoe from Seabeck to a logging camp on the other side of the Canal. They embarked in the face of a rising storm and the good advice of Marshall Blinn, who urged them to stay over until the storm had passed. The body of one was picked up on the beach; the other was never found.

Logging, sawmilling and shipping were all tough, man-killing occupations in the 19th Century and sudden death was no stranger to Seabeck or any Northwest mill town during the intervening years.

Violent arguments remained much commoner than violent death, however. The classic difference of opinion at Seabeck was that between Edward Clayson and the management of the mill company. Clayson, a man of many talents, originally came to town to open an independent hotel, an enterprise which was viewed coldly by the mill company. It was good business to get as much of the mill payroll back in

the company coffers as possible by means of company-owned stores, boarding houses and mess halls, and Clayson's hotel attracted too many mill employees.

Every effort was made to discourage trade at Clayson's hostelry. Clayson even charged that Richard Holyoke caused the bridge which connected the main town with the hotel to be demolished.

Later Clayson expanded his activities. When Seabeck got a post office he obtained a government contract to carry the mail from Port Gamble aboard a small sloop, which also served as a local freight and passenger carrier of sorts. Clayson was captain and crew of his little craft and would sail or row it, according to the weather. If all went well he could cover his 80-mile route in a week, but he claimed to keep no set schedule and folks learned to expect the mail when they saw it coming.

Still seeking outlets for his energy and his intense dislike for the mill company, Clayson began publication of Seabeck's first newspaper, a small, single-sheet affair which, like his sloop, had no set schedule for its appearances. The newspaper was largely filled with accounts of the outrages of Holyoke, whom Clayson referred to scathingly as "Sir Hollyhock, minion hireling of the absentee King of Seabeck" and the villanies of the mill company in general.

There was little or no space left to chronicle the local "doings" so dear to the hearts of rural newspaper readers, so Clayson had practically no paying subscribers to his little journal. Since the mill company controlled most of the business in town, he had no advertisers, either, and the newspaper was not profitable.

He did, however, achieve the last word against the hated mill company and its officials. In 1911 he had published at his own expense a paperback book describing life in Seabeck from the viewpoint of Edward Clayson, nonconformist. Needless to

say, the Washington Mill Company and Richard Holyoke received short shrift in this interesting little volume.

The mill, the shipyard and the company are all long vanished from the Northwest woods and waterways and Edward Clayson's book remains the only printed history of boom town Seabeck. The historian searching library shelves for tales of Seabeck must, perforce, give heed to the barbed prose of this angry man of Hood's Canal.

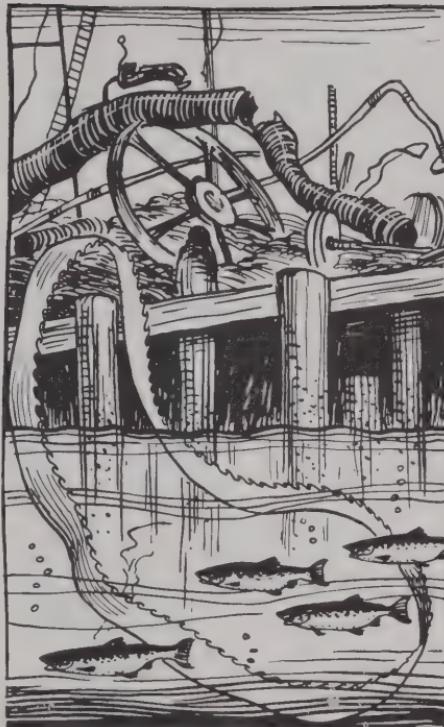
And so the spirit of at least one of Seabeck's colorful pioneers probably rests content in the shadowy cemetery above the cove. They tried to run Edward Clayson out of business three-quarters of a century ago, but he's still getting in his licks at the "monopoly" and the "absentee landlords" . . . all with a few sticks of type and a jar of printer's ink.

## FIRE!

August 6, 1886, started out as an ordinary Puget Sound summer day. At Seabeck the town was awakened to activity as usual by the strident blast of the mill whistle. By seven o'clock the saws were eating into dripping fir logs fresh from the mill pond, adding to the piles of stacked lumber on the dock.

It had been a dry summer and the lumber piles were tinder dry. During the noon hour workers went out on the dock and leaned against them while they ate their lunches, enjoying the light breeze from the Canal and watching the steam tug *Richard Holyoke* nudge another sailing ship into the lineup of lumber carriers at the dock's edge.

The weather was hot and dry, but the sun was not bright. It never was during late summers in the Northwest. Forest fires were burning in a score of areas along the Canal, the Sound, in the Cascade Mountains and along the Olympic Peninsula. No one worried about them or tried to control them. Everyone knew the natural resources of the North-



west were inexhaustible, so why worry about a few hundred square miles of ruined timber?

The newcomer to the fleet of lumber ships at the dock wasted no time. When the lines were secure her donkeyman went ashore and brought back an armload of dry, pitchy wood. Soon smoke was rolling from the stubby funnel of the ship's donkey engine. Steam was being generated for power to swing the stacks of lumber from the mill dock to the ship's holds.

The donkeyman swung open his furnace door, raked the fire and tossed on more wood. He noted with satisfaction the fine bed of hot coals and the mounting pressure on the steam gauge. He failed to note the shower of sparks which spiralled from the smokestack to drift off toward the stacked lumber alongside. The gentle breeze had freshened into a strong south wind.

The lumber pile on which the sparks from the ship's donkey landed smouldered unspectacularly for a while until a stronger gust of wind whipped flames into sudden red-gold explosion. The people of Seabeck had been breathing forest fire smoke for weeks and it was a while before anyone noticed the added smoke from the fire on the mill dock.

The forest fires had been remote and unimportant. The dock fire was close at hand and urgent. The shouts of men were drowned out by the mighty voice of the mill whistle, sounding the long blasts of the emergency alarm. Ship's crews hastily dropped mooring lines and raised scraps of jibs and spankers to work their vessels away from the now blazing dock.

Workers rushed from the mill toward the dock; were stopped in their tracks by the blast of a rising inferno. Obviously the dock was doomed, the ships would have

to take care of themselves and they would have a fight on their hands saving the mill. Parties were detached to climb the ladders to the roofs of the mill buildings where barrels of water lined the ridgepoles for just such an emergency.

Seabeck had no fire department. Buckets and barrels were no match for the advancing tide of flame. Men fell back, singed and blackened, to watch the great new mill explode in flame. The older buildings flared up like tinder and the flames raced on to engulf the shipyard and the whole waterfront.

No mill whistle awakened Seabeck next morning. The mill was gone. So were the docks and the shipyards and the ships. There had been no deaths in the great fire and the town itself had been saved, but its reason for being had vanished in the flames. Spirits rose when word was passed that the mill company was already planning construction of an even bigger mill on the ruins of the old one.

New foundations were soon under way, but they were never completed. A strike and other labor troubles halted construction. Good timber was no longer available on the edge of town. All in all, the company officials decided, it might be best to build their new mill somewhere else. Port Hadlock was selected and there the new mill was erected. The mill hands went to Hadlock too.

Almost over night, Seabeck had become a ghost town. The liveliest place on Puget Sound had become just another quiet cove on Hood's Canal . . . as it had been thirty years before when the bark *Brontes* dropped anchor there at the end of the Cape Horn road.

The Indians came back to fish and gather berries and once again the slap of salmon and the grumbling of bear could be heard on the quiet mornings at *L-Ka-bak-hu*.



## LONG SLEEP and AWAKENING

The town of Seabeck was destined to sleep for almost thirty years. From 1886 until 1914 there was little evidence of the vital awakening which was to come. Actually, with the destruction of the mill and the shipyards, Seabeck had abruptly ceased being a town. Most of its population had depended upon the lumber and shipbuilding industries for a livelihood. People moved to places where work was to be had. The saloons and the hotels were closed; such institutions as the public library, the baseball team and the Seabeck Brass Band became memories of the past.

After the fire Seabeck was visited only rarely by campers and boatmen. Its very existence was almost forgotten as new boom towns flexed their muscles and loudly announced that they were the "liveliest place on the Sound." At the turn of the century A. L. Hotchkiss bought the old Washington Mill Company store, which had escaped the fire, and reopened it as a typical country

general store. This was only a small step forward, compared to the grand schemes of Marshall Blinn and his associates, but it was the first forward step the ghost town had seen in many years. The store drew the scattered farmers and fishermen of the area back to Seabeck as an informal trading and social center. It was the beginning of the awakening.

With the Canal region becoming increasingly popular as a tourist attraction, a stage line was placed in operation between Bremerton and Seabeck in 1910. The erstwhile mill town became a popular vacation and camping mecca for citizens of Seattle and other Puget Sound cities that had kept on growing. The stage line, inaugurated by George Edgar, eventually passed to the Puget Sound Navigation Company, which used it as a link in the cross-Canal ferry route between Brinnon, on the west shore, and Seabeck on the east.

The first Seabeck-Brinnon ferry had been a log float navigated shakily across the Canal by the Nichols brothers during World War I days. They soon replaced it with a scow, towed by a gasoline launch and later with a small ferry boat. Following the Puget Sound Navigation Company regime, which increased Seabeck's importance as a tourist center, Mrs. Bertie Olson, famed "Ferryboat Annie" of the Canal, operated the little steam ferry *Clatawa* on the Seabeck-Brinnon route until 1941, when bridge construction made ferryboating unprofitable.

Following the institution of the stage and ferry lines, Seabeck lost its isolation, but it still remained essentially a quiet backwater in a fast expanding Northwest empire . . . a town where time had stood still since territorial days.

The pattern for Seabeck's future was set in 1914, when much of the original town-ship was purchased by Lawrence J. and George Colman of the pioneer Seattle family.

Their purpose was to establish this quiet, beautiful spot as an interdenominational conference and camping area for Northwest churches and religious organizations.

This and more has been accomplished by them and by the present members of the Colman family. Not only is the 700-acre conference ground an ideal place for the re-creation of tired minds and for the quiet consideration of things spiritual. It serves also as a living memorial to an age and a way of life that is past.

The attractive swimming pool was once the mill pond of Marshall Blinn, where the great Douglas fir logs paused in their pilgrimage to the screaming headsaws. Flood gates have been installed so that the pool may be filled with salt water at high tide. At low tide the pool may be drained, allowing the sun to heat and sterilize it.

The meeting house on the Seabeck conference grounds was once the mill company cook house, where poor Ah Fong cooked hearty meals for sawyers and green-chain men before making his last fatal trip to his private bank in the forest. The United States Hotel, which Marshall Blinn tried to operate on "temperance principles" is now the Conference Grounds inn. The counter where present day guests register was the original bar, installed when temperance principles were abandoned and over which oceans of strong whiskey poured to quench the lusty thirsts of backwoods loggers in the roaring days of the skid roads and the bull teams. Not far away, on the waterfront, lies the ancient boiler from the steam tug *Richard Holyoke*, early product of the Seabeck shipyard named for the manager of the big mill and arch enemy of the embattled pioneer journalist, Edward Clayson.

To this degree, Seabeck is indeed, the town where time has seemingly stood still. Everywhere about the lovely Christian Conference Grounds are lovingly preserved mementos of the past. Overlaid with the gentle patina of time, they bear mute evidence of days that have become legendary in the West.

But these grounds have done more than preserve the past. They have brought a new life to legendary Seabeck . . . a life as colorful and fascinating as that of vanished mill town days. Here, around the campfires above the quiet waters of the Sound may be seen missionaries and church workers from every corner of the globe. The tumult of saloon and shipside is long dead, but the music of outstanding choral groups is heard, or, perhaps, the sonorous chant of the muezzin . . . the Moham-medan crier of the hour of prayer, repeated by a bearded Egyptian at an assembly fire in Seabeck Conference Grounds.

Since the strength of this new Seabeck is based on spiritual values, it can no longer be wiped out as was the timber economy of another century. When Seabeck was all but destroyed by a second fire in the summer of 1957 there was no question of survival. Rebuilding was immediate, for the Conference Grounds were untouched by the flames.

Modern buildings, including a striking tepee-design staff lounge, were designed for the Conference Grounds by architect Robert Durham. The town followed the example of its leading institution, rebuilding itself for the second time, but this time rapidly and neatly.

Lumber is no longer exported from Seabeck, but something more important is produced there and disseminated throughout the world . . . Ideas!

From the president of Shaw University fighting for racial equality in the days when it was not yet a popular cause, to the national leaders of the Y.M.C.A. and Y.W.C.A., meeting each year at the Christian Conference Grounds, the people who work at Seabeck today have infinitely greater influence on the nation than did the loggers and mill men of the past.

Pioneering still takes place here. Interdenominational cooperation between members of all churches was the foundation upon which the Conference Grounds were founded. It is a concept which has spread everywhere. Students of Northwest denominational colleges have met here in youth camps since 1914.

Seabeck no longer boasts of being "the liveliest place on Puget Sound." That noisy and provincial cry has been replaced by quiet pride . . . pride in the fact that the influence of Seabeck and its unique Christian Conference Grounds is now worldwide.









